

ALEXANDRIA WOMEN MAKE HISTORY!
A Brief Walking Tour of Old Town Alexandria

Presented by
The Alexandria Commission for Women
And
The Friends of the Alexandria Commission for Women

The tour consists of 7 sites within 6 blocks - walk the tour in this order, beginning at the Torpedo Factory on Union Street:

1. Torpedo Factory/Alexandria Waterfront - 105 N. Union St.
2. Ramsay House, 221 King Street
3. Office on Women, 421 block of King St. - Harriett Williams home site and Court House in 500 block
4. Cross Market Square toward Carlyle House AT 121 N. Fairfax Street
5. Carlyle House
6. City Hall (Cameron Street)
7. Gadsby's Tavern - 134 N. Royal St.

SITE ONE: TORPEDO FACTORY AT 105 N. UNION STREET - 3RD FLOOR, ALEXANDRIA ARCHEOLOGY - see china owned by Alexandria slave Harriett Williams

Notes on slave women's lives:

- The first Black "bond servants" arrived in the Virginia colony in about 1619, but generally slavery didn't reach its greatest volume here until the 17th and early 18th century, when it replaced earlier colonial reliance on indentured white servants. By about 1640, some Blacks in Virginia and Maryland were present and labeled "servants for life."
- At peak, Alexandria had about 1,500 slaves -- and just before the Civil War started, there were about 2,800 African Americans in Alexandria -- half free, and half slave.
- First record of a woman slave: "**Mary a Negro woman**" is recorded in Virginia around 1621-22. She married a free Black man, Anthony Johnston, who worked on a plantation, and they had 4 children.
- Slavery was focused on the big plantations, of course, and it affected women differently than men. Women were not as likely to be captured and sent to America directly from Africa as were men, but they were often sexually mistreated on the passage over, as well as beaten.
- Women became runaways less often than men (1 of 10), probably because of their children. It's a mistake to think of women slaves as less angry and more passive than men, however....they took their revenge in other ways...destroying tools, faking illness, setting fires and, on occasion, poisoning abusive masters!

[STILL AT THE TORPEDO FACTORY, BUT DOWNSTAIRS NOW]

Founding the Torpedo Factory

The Torpedo Factory, once just what its name implies, a torpedo factory in World War II, was transformed by the cleverness, inspiration and hard work of two Alexandria woman.

In 1974, two working artists, **Marge Alderson** and **Marian Van Landingham**, led the charge to change what was then a derelict and abandoned old building into an arts center.

Their idea -- which they convinced the City of Alexandria to support -- was to create a space for the artists of the community to not only work on their art, but to allow the public to watch them work and to purchase the art. Massive renovation was done in the 1980s, including a lot of "sweat equity" by the artists, many of whom have studios here today, and, to make a long story short -- today's Torpedo Factory is the largest and most unusual visual arts center in America.

There are 84 studios here, several group studios, several galleries, and an art school. Van Landingham and Alderson are both still painting and both have studios here -- and the Torpedo Factory brings hundreds of thousands of tourists to our city every year, greatly helping the economy. Two women's dreams and energy made this a reality.

[GO OUT THE BACK DOOR OF THE TORPEDO FACTORY TO THE WATERFRONT] -- The Alexandria Waterfront/ Margaret Brent

Alexandria grew and prospered because in its founding days, it had a harbor that could accommodate large ships. It is, of course, much shallower today -- hundreds of years of silt have played their role.

Alexandria was initially populated by men of business, who made their livelihoods selling equipment, supplies, grain and more to the big plantations in what is now Fairfax County, and beyond. Many of the original traders settled in Alexandria.

One of the people who probably landed somewhere along this waterfront, somewhere between here and National Airport to our left, was a remarkable woman named **Margaret Brent**. She came long before the city of Alexandria was even founded, and she had her eye on property.

Margaret Brent is the first woman in America to ask for the right to vote -- and she did it in 1648!

Brent, who was born in Europe in 1601, came to what was then the American colonies in 1638 to seek religious freedom. She came to the colony of Maryland with what was called a "patent" -- a grant of land -- from Cecil Calvert giving her land in her own name. She and her sister Mary developed their property very well in what is now St. Mary's County, Maryland, naming it Sisters Freehold. They had no slaves, working only with indentured servants.

Margaret became involved in her colony's business affairs, including lending money to other, less-successful colonists. Collecting debts owed to her and other business led her to court frequently, and led her to be considered, by the American Bar Association, as America's first woman lawyer. The ABA's Award to Women is named in her honor!

As a single woman, Brent could own property and represent herself and others -- but she could NOT participate in the Maryland Assembly, something she needed to do to properly conduct business as a landowner. She petitioned for the right to vote in 1648, and she was denied.

Probably in disgust (we don't really know this but can imagine!) -- Brent and her sister packed up and came across the Chesapeake Bay to Virginia, where they bought 11,000 acres -- including the land we're standing on and much of what makes up Alexandria and part of Fairfax County. She lived on her Virginia plantation, "Peace" -- located in Fairfax County, not here -- until her death in 1671.

SITE TWO: HEAD UP KING STREET TO #221 -- RAMSAY HOUSE/VISITOR'S CENTER -- ANNE RAMSAY

This tiny home you are standing near is considered to be the oldest original home in Alexandria -- and today it is the City's main visitor information center.

This tiny place was the "in-town" home of two remarkable people, Alexandria founders William and **Anne McCarthy Ramsay**. Born in 1740, Anne McCarthy was the daughter of Alexandria's mayor, Dennis McCarthy, and Sarah Bell, a cousin of George Washington! She married a Scotsman, William Ramsay, who with her father and others had helped to found the city. Anne had five daughters and 3 sons -- but the 8 children didn't occupy all of her time, it appears.

During the American Revolution, she was chosen Treasurer of Alexandria and Fairfax County, and led a huge fundraising drive among the monied people of Virginia to help her cousin, George Washington, feed and clothe and arm his soldiers through the hard years of the war. She raised about \$75,000 -- and in today's dollars, that sum represents millions of dollars. Without her efforts, one wonders what might have happened to the Continental Army...

SITE THREE: [HEAD UP KING STREET, PAST MARKET SQUARE, AND INTO THE 400 BLOCK, STOPPING OUTSIDE THE OFFICE ON WOMEN AT 421 KING.] 400 & 500 BLOCKS OF KING STREET

There isn't a lot to see here, but a lot happened in these two blocks.

First, the office building we're outside of houses Alexandria's very active **Office on Women, and the Commission for Women**. In the 1970's a city employee named **Vola Lawson** created and chair the Ad Hoc Commission of the Status of Women in Alexandria -- and a small revolution began!

This Commission, innocently billed as a one-time event to explore discrimination against women in the city, never went away. It became today's 15-member city Commission for Women -- and that led to the creation of the our Office on Women, which provides a wide array of services, including a shelter for battered women and their families, to the women of our community. And you'll learn more about Vola Lawson a bit later.

In the 500 block of our town, you can see the entrance of the Alexandria Court House, which is set back from the street.

Alexandria's first woman judge was the **Honorable Irene Pancoast**. She became a full-time judge in Alexandria's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court in 1954. Before taking the bench, she had been an attorney and White House staff member.

Another important breakthrough for women came in 1998, when the **Honorable Becky Moore** became the first woman judge on Alexandria's General District Court, where she serves today.

Near the site of the Courthouse was the home of the slave woman you learned about at Alexandria Archeology, **Harriett Williams**. She lived in a home outside that of her master when she lived in Alexandria.

SITE FOUR: CARLYLE HOUSE - 121 N. FAIRFAX -- CROSS BACK THROUGH MARKET SQUARE, THE OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY OPERATING FARMER'S MARKET IN THE NATION...AND WALK TO THE IMPOSING MANSION AND GARDENS TOURS ARE AVAILABLE OF CARLYLE HOUSE.

Carlyle House has been part of Alexandria since the mid-1700s. It was the home of **John Carlyle**, a businessman who settled in Alexandria in 1741. When lots were first auctioned in Alexandria in 1749, Carlyle bought two of the most expensive. The site was ideal for his numerous businesses and gave good access to the all-important waterfront.

Carlyle began building the house in 1751, and it took 3 years to complete. Its style is Georgian Palladian, and it has not changed significantly in scale and appearance since it was built. A prominent businessman and friend of dignitaries like George Washington, Carlyle fell in love with and married **Sarah (Sally, as everyone called her) Fairfax** in 1747. She was just 19 years old -- and at that age she was responsible not only for overseeing Carlyle House, but also her family's enormous plantation, Belvoir, in Fairfax County.

Sally, the daughter of one of the area's most prominent and wealthy men, William Fairfax, gave birth to the first of her seven children. *Of all of these children, only her fifth child and daughter, also Sarah, survived early childhood.* Sally herself died giving birth to her seventh child -- leaving Carlyle distraught after just 11 years of marriage and with responsibility for a little girl and a newborn infant.

Carlyle married **Sibyl West**, the daughter of a friend -- and Sibyl had four children in six years, three of whom survived. She also died in childbirth.

These were the wealthy women, at the top of the area's social pyramid -- and yet their lives were difficult and filled with the tragic loss of young children and their own fragile health. Neither woman lived to be 40 years old.

Carlyle's daughter with Sally, named Sarah, survived to adulthood and lived in her family home with her own family after John Carlyle died.

SITE FIVE: WALK OVER TO CAMERON STREET AND TO ALEXANDRIA'S CITY HALL AND VISIT THE VOLA LAWSON LOBBY.

Women Political Leaders

You are standing in Alexandria's City Hall -- a site of great significance for women's history in our city. It is here that women elected to public office, and serving on the city staff in high positions, have helped shape our city.

The first Alexandria woman elected to serve in the Virginia House of Delegates was **Marion Galland**. She was elected in 1963, and served three terms.

In 1973, 10 years later, the first women were elected to Alexandria's City Council. They were **Beverly Beidler** and **Nora Lamborne**.

Bev Beidler continues to be an active part of city government today, although she no longer serves on the Council. She is a former member of the Alexandria Commission for Women. **Lamborne** has died, but when she was elected, was a widow and the mother of 8 children! She was also an editor of a local newspaper, the Alexandria Journal.

Other women who have served on the City Council but no longer do so include

- **Lois Walker**, a prominent area businesswoman,;
- **Ellen Pickering**, a long-time environmental activist,
- **Marlee Inman**. Inman became the City's first woman Vice Mayor in 1985.

Today, three women serve on the Council -- and as you can see from all the campaign signs throughout the community -- they are all running for re-election:

- **Del Pepper**, who has served for many years and has also been vice mayor;
- **Claire Eberwein**, a former School Board member
- **Joyce Woodson**, an area business owner. Woodson is the first African-American woman to serve on the Council.

Alexandria is also represented by a woman in our State Senate. **The Honorable Patsy Ticer** also served on our City Council for many years, and became the first woman elected mayor in 1991.

And **The Honorable Marian Van Landingham**, whom you will remember as a founder of the Torpedo Factory, also serves in the Virginia House of Delegates, serving there since 1982. She has been a particular advocate for women's issues, such as the protection of battered spouses and victims of sexual assault.

Finally, you may have noticed you are standing in the **Vola Lawson** Lobby, here in City Hall. Vola became Alexandria's first woman City Manager in 1985, and held this position with great distinction until 2000. Because of her work, our City has an excellent financial standing. Vola improved programs for women and children, improved economic development, housing and much more. A breast cancer survivor, she launched our annual Walk to Fight Breast Cancer, raising money to give poor women free diagnostic tests. She also founded the Commission for Women.

As you can see, once women got into city government, we've taken hold! The work of the women we've talked about helped win for Alexandria national recognition as a great city for working women in 2000 -2003

***SITE SIX: CROSS ROYAL STREET TO GADSBY'S TAVERN - 134 N. ROYAL ST. -
a nice place for a "historical" lunch***

The Tavern, under many different names, has been operating most of the time since the days before the Revolutionary War.

Here we find another interesting Alexandria woman, one **Mary Hawkins**, who was for a time the owner and manager of Gadsby's -- although at the time, it was called "Mrs. Hawkins." This building was the heart of Alexandria's social and political life, and we know for sure that George Washington ate here when he was in town. His diary for January 17, 1774 notes, "Went up to Alexandria to court...supp'd at Mrs. Hawkins and came home afterward."

This concludes our quick 6-block walking tour of some of the women's history sites in Old Town Alexandria. Thank you for your interest in our City and some of the women who make it such an interesting place to live and work!

***The Alexandria Commission for Women
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